

*The
Action/Reflection
Cycle*

HYDE'S ACTION-REFLECTION CYCLE

INTRODUCTION

Hyde School: "A socially embodied moral argument that works on an action-reflection cycle."

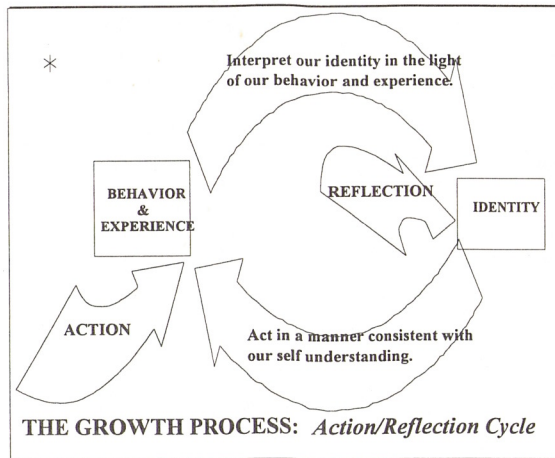
Our argument asserts that every individual has a unique potential to fulfill a dynamic personal destiny. It then becomes the school's job to facilitate the student's efforts to get on a track that will ultimately connect with this destiny. Prospects for this connection are enhanced when attitude is valued over aptitude, effort over ability, and character over talent.

A curriculum honoring these three qualities has been in development at Hyde School since 1966. This curriculum represents a break from much that has traditionally been exalted by schools in America. Schools have long been preoccupied with the talents of students. Students are placed, rated, ranked, and compared in accordance with these talents and with so-called objective tests of their innate abilities and/or scholastic aptitudes. This order of education embodies the belief that talent, once developed, will lead to eventual success in life. This premise seems logical enough and, for a long time, it appeared to serve America well. All of us are familiar with the Horatio Alger-like stories of those who have utilized education as a "ticket" out of adverse living conditions and into a world of material wealth, comfort and respect.

Hyde offers a new premise and represents a new order or, as some have suggested, signals a return to an ancient one. (e.g., Aristotle) Hyde rejects the talent-success model and endorses what might be called the character-fulfillment model. Hyde students are encouraged to develop their character in the belief that this will lead to eventual fulfillment in life. This emphasis has resulted in the discovery of a pleasant by-product: fulfilled people also tend to become successful people.

Enough of the philosophical foundation of the action-reflection cycle; what follows is a more mechanical explanation of some of the specific components of the Hyde program. Visitors to our campus are often struck by the number

of times that students, faculty, and parents utter the words “**character**” and “**unique potential**” as they talk about the school. We share a remarkable unanimity in our belief that our purpose is inextricably tied to these two entities. However, we have learned that character cannot be taught or even instilled. It **can** be summoned forth and then developed by the students themselves. Thus, Hyde seeks to offer values-forming experiences, challenges that summon the personal character of our students. Students then reflect upon these experiences both privately and among their peers. This is the action-reflection cycle.



The Action-Reflection Diagram demonstrates a model of learning that functions similarly to the concept of perpetual motion. A student learns: “As I act a certain way, I begin to have a certain view of myself. As I accept this new view of myself, I act in accordance with it.” Thus, the actions help form a new identity which, in turn, inspires the motivation to perpetuate the actions that gave birth to this new identity. The activity and identity reinforce each other in a perpetual chain reaction of personal growth.

ACTION

Some of the components of the action side of the cycle include:

academics
athletics
performing arts
community action
jobs program
wilderness program

Initially, the **academic** program appears quite traditional. With courses organized sequentially along departmental lines, the Hyde classroom initially appears similar to the typical American high school classroom. Hyde School’s experience has been with college preparatory academics. (More than 95% of Hyde’s graduates attend four year colleges.) However, Hyde’s students are assessed in accordance with their learning attitudes as opposed to an exclusive focus on mastery of skills. An example of this assessment is the honors/warnings list, an “honor roll” posted every other week that is based on effort. Students are also introduced to Hyde’s concept of the “academic triangle.” Hyde visualizes the learning process as a triangle. In traditional education the teacher and the subject form the base of the triangle. It then usually becomes the student’s responsibility to break into the relationship between the teacher and the subject, to learn what the teacher knows or to regurgitate the teacher’s interpretation of a given subject. Hyde diverges from this paradigm in that we place the student and the teacher at the base of the triangle. Together they pursue their respective potentials through the medium of the subject matter. We conclude that true character education must be student oriented rather than subject oriented.

All students at Hyde participate in interscholastic **athletics**. In most schools, organized athletics are for the students who are already proficient in them. We believe that there is intrinsic value in competition and in the dynamics of teamwork and competition. Critics will sometimes exclaim, “You mean you force students to compete? What about the student who has no interest or acumen in sports?” We might reply, “You mean you force students to take algebra? What about the student who has no interest or acumen in algebra?” Decades ago, America’s schools curiously chose to nurture but one aspect of a student’s development and deemed that the rest would be acquired voluntarily in extracurricular activities. At Hyde, we have coined an acronym - IPSES - to refer to the five types of development that we believe must occur in the educational process:

intellectual
 physical
 spiritual
 emotional
 social

Schools typically require proof of development in the first type and expect that students will develop the other four on a happenstance (i.e.

extracurricular) basis. Obviously, at Hyde we disagree with this prioritization.

Students, faculty, and parents participate in **performing arts** productions during the course of each academic year. A high point of the year is auditions when every student and faculty member sings a solo, unaccompanied by instrumentation, in front of the entire Hyde community. Some alumni have said that these solos were among the most valuable opportunities for personal growth they experienced during their Hyde years. It is exciting to observe how the same students who balked at the exercise as sophomores will enthusiastically lead the way as seniors. If a student stood up in a typical high school assembly and belted out a solo, he or she would be laughed out of the auditorium. However, this does not occur during our auditions. One doesn't laugh at a peer when one realizes that one's turn is next. Everyone realizes that mutual support is essential and this feeling eventually fills the room. Each individual is enriched and the experience does wonders for school spirit.

Each year, only one or two Hyde graduates pursue performing arts in college. However, many return years later and point to the performing arts as preparation for a successful job interview or as the beginning point to a better understanding of self. The following story speaks to the value of this facet of the action cycle. It tells of a young (14) female student's experience on the road with our performing group, a group that might be considered "Varsity" performing arts.

"When I first came to Hyde I was very nervous about doing performing arts. Kind of like I am right now."

Thus spoke Jen Swanson on the stage at Van Sickle Junior High in Springfield, Massachusetts. She spoke for many in the cast. All could sense that this crowd of students would not be as supportive as the one back at school. We were going to try to teach the Springfield kids about the Hyde education in a half-hour show. Moods in the audience were varied: guarded hope, cynicism, apprehension, suspicion, mockery, etc. The Hyde performers had a few moods of their own. Many, probably most, for the first time were in a social setting where they constituted the racial minority. On with the show.

After just three notes of introductory instrumental accompaniment, the audience collectively realized that Jen was about to sing Whitney Houston's "The Greatest Love of All". We could feel the Springfield kids coming alive. Ah, our song selection would not hurt us today. Then Jen kicked in with the vocals. I wide-angled the audience for its reaction from my perch in the rear of the theatre.

They laughed. Some laughed hard.

These kids wanted Whitney. They also weren't the least bit shy about indicating that Jen's rendition was a bit shy of the real McCoy. It seemed unfair. At this moment I felt for those performers who get booed off stage at Amateur Night at the Apollo Theatre. My protective instincts kicked in. What if that were my little girl up there? Why should the youngest member of the cast have the most pressure? Then my focus zoomed front ward and telephotoed Jen at center stage. How would she react?

She sang. She sang hard.

She stayed right with it, just as she had been taught. Her perseverance symbolized the point we were trying to make to our audience. She won them over! By the second verse it was almost as if the audience collectively realized, "Hey, I get it! The point isn't to sound like Whitney. The point is to give it my best. Come to think of it, I don't sound like Whitney. But maybe I am capable of giving it my best."

It was a great moment. Our kids had worked hard: twelve shows in only three days. We set out to teach the Springfield kids something about Hyde. One cast member noted that they probably taught us more about ourselves.

(from Malcolm's Monthly, 2/91, Vol. 4, Issue 6)

With **community action**, Hyde conducts many local activities in the interest of community service. Some of these activities include a Big Brother/Sister program, work with senior citizens, environmental clean-ups, and recycling. Frankly, we operate these programs not so much because of the

value they have for our local community, but more because of the benefits to our own students. Individuals who become responsible for others become, in turn, more responsible individuals. As we are fond of saying, "You've gotta give it to get it."

There are several other action components of the Hyde learning system. One of these is the **jobs program**. Every student performs a job on campus every day such as cleaning up the academic wing, maintaining the gymnasium or working in the dining room. Furthermore, all students help maintain their dormitories. Our **wilderness program** is another part of the action cycle. Students hike in the mountains and canoe and camp on the rivers and bays of Maine. Hyde also offers low and high ropes courses on our 170-acre campus. The ropes course provides an ideal team-building environment and is regularly experienced by students, faculty and parents.

REFLECTION

Components of the reflection side of the equation include:

admissions interview
challenge teams
journaling
school meeting
seminar
senior evaluations
the graduation speech

The Hyde experience begins with the **admissions interview**. The membership requirement at Hyde concerns one's willingness to honestly and openly address three personal questions:

Who am I?

Where am I going with my life?

How do I get there?

Tests and grades are not considered in the admissions process. (We sometimes joke that we are the only school that doesn't even view some of these materials until the admissions decision has already been made.) In

our view, good candidates are those who demonstrate a desire to address these three questions and who are willing to commit to follow the precepts of our **Statement of Purpose**, a copy of which concludes this brochure. The commitment to one's best must be made by both students **and** parents.

The **challenge team**, a basic unit of membership for Hyde's students, consists of a dozen students supervised by two faculty members. The groups meet at least once a week to discuss personal issues as well as issues that affect life at school. It is a time to share personally and receive input from peers. A Hyde faculty member is expected to know what makes each student in the counseling group "tick" and to be the primary contact for parents.

Hyde has been actively involved in **journaling** for a number of years. The entire school assembles twice a week and writes for twenty minutes with questions presented by a faculty member or a student. The following is an excerpt from a journaling session on Martin Luther King's Birthday:

"I have a dream that one day my four little children will be judged not by the color of the skin but by the content of their character."

1. Was I raised to honor this? Yes, No, Somewhat
2. Describe a time when I was unfairly prejudged by others.
3. How did I feel? How did I respond?
4. Would I respond the same way again?
5. Have there been times when I've prejudged others unfairly?
6. What experiences can I point to which tell me that I do follow Dr. King's dream in the way that I judge others?
7. One positive action I can take in this regard is...

The journals remain the personal property of each student and serve as confidential records of personal growth which can be reviewed in years ahead. The journaling process has extended to many areas of school life. For example, it is common for students to maintain journals in various classes. I sometimes present a quote pertinent to history and ask students to reflect upon it for five minutes during a class session.

While this brochure examines the action-reflection cycle by isolating its components, the components actually interact to form an overall experience,

one in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The following story speaks to the interplay of journaling, the school meeting, and a student's conscience.

Our first full week ended with a powerful school meeting. I yanked everyone from evening study hall when I became aware of profane graffiti in the Student Union mens' room. I stated my own disgust and deducing the gender of the perpetrator by virtue of the location of the offensive message, asked him to summon his courage and confess to me on the following morning. I went to bed that night certain that we would never discover the identity of the graffiti writer. I settled on the hope that a statement had been made that might deter future defacing of the campus.

The next morning I arrived at my office, and lo and behold, a young man was timidly waiting for me. We sat down in my office and he confessed. I asked him why he decided to own up to his deed. He cited the previous morning's school-wide journaling session where we wrote about integrity and personal honor. He explained how he had written of his desire to become a man of true integrity and that this would never happen if he didn't "clear the decks" on himself. Later that morning he faced his peers at announcements and repeated to the entire school what he had earlier confessed to me. We wound up using the circumstance as a kick-off for the afternoon school meeting. A weight had been lifted off of the shoulders of this student. It was a wonderful example of the Hyde program in action with a component of our "action-reflection cycle", journaling, directly contributing to the development of conscience. The student got support at the school meeting but was not turned into a hero - he still had work-crew to deal with. As I told him, "your exemplary honesty does not diminish the seriousness of your wrongful deed but it does open up your future opportunities. You've truly given yourself a break." Then he went to work sanding the door.

(Malcolm's Monthly, 9/92, Vol. 6, I

The weekly **school meeting** is another important time for reflection. The entire community assembles in one place and actively addresses those three questions:

Who am I?
Where am I going with my life?
How do I get there?

We generally try to unite the journaling questions and the topics discussed in the counseling groups with the school meeting. Sometimes we'll discuss problems within the school or issues affecting our world, such as race, crime and sexual behavior.

The **seminar** is a critical element in the reflection process, one which has been a part of the Hyde program since the earliest days of the school. It is an honest process of group sharing of hopes, fears, strengths, and experiences. Participants engage in the process of assessing personal inventories and assist others in doing the same. The seminar begins by someone reading aloud the Five Principles and Seminar Guidelines. A timekeeper, appointed by the group, ensures that each member of the group has the opportunity to participate. Then the topic for that seminar is discussed. Some examples include:

1. How is the person I show to the world different from the one I keep to myself?
2. How would I assess my effectiveness as a student, teacher or parent?
3. Which character trait am I proud to have passed on to my children? Which do I regret?
4. Which of the Five Principles do I most thoroughly embrace? Which is the one I haven't yet explored?

Sometimes the seminar will break into smaller groups in order to afford participants more time. In any case, each individual speaks for a few moments and invites comments from other participants. Sometimes participants read journal entries or personal papers especially written for the seminar. The seminar typically lasts from 90 minutes to two hours.

Senior Evaluations & The Graduation Speech It has been said that the Hyde experience is a process that begins with an interview and ends with a speech. Each graduating senior speaks for two minutes at the Hyde Commencement. It is perhaps the most moving time of each year when the senior addresses the entire community while his or her parents stand proudly in the audience. The senior evaluation process represents the culmination of a student's career at Hyde. Seniors and faculty gather throughout the spring. (They spend 40 to 50 hours of seminar time together to prepare for graduation). Each senior presents a self-evaluation of the year just completed and peers and faculty respond with input. The evaluation is intended to enable each senior to take a deep, honest look at the self prior to departing Hyde as students. Just as the word "commencement" means beginning, the Hyde graduate is about to begin a new phase of life. Preparation for this phase requires introspection, but also comment and reflection from peers and faculty. The evaluation process enables each senior to formulate a synthesis that can serve as a guide for the future. This synthesis is then communicated to the entire Hyde community when each senior delivers a graduation speech.

CONCLUSION

I have isolated many of the individual components of the action-reflection cycle in an attempt to present a skeletal view. I regret this somewhat because it may appear that the action and the reflection components are mutually exclusive, that one begins where the other lets off. I have often had the same frustration trying to teach history. Because most textbooks are organized chronologically, the student can get the mistaken impression that all history is sequential. Consider this typical textbook approach:

- First, the American Colonies are preoccupied with the Revolution.
- Then everyone appears to turn their attention to the Constitution.
- Then George Washington begins holding court as the first President.
- Then everyone heads out west to explore the frontier.
- Then slavery becomes a big issue which eventually explodes into war.

Although the textbook may give excellent descriptions of these events, the student may miss the understanding that these factors were interrelated, that some early Americans concerned themselves with all five simultaneously. Teachers at Hyde are constantly integrating multiple components of the action and reflection cycle at any given time. The football team may seminar after practice; a math class will utilize journaling; and a challenge team will experience the ropes course together or perhaps perform a skit at a school meeting.

There are few places where the action and reflection components blend more thoroughly than they do in the Family Learning Center where students, parents, and faculty experience a vast number of endeavors together. Parents and students at the Family Learning Center will experience the wilderness, engage in performing arts, write papers, and will have discussions in a seminar format. There is a constant interplay of the action-reflection cycle at work. This is how Hyde works when it is functioning properly.

Malcolm W. Gauld
1993

Hyde School Statement of Purpose

Each of us is gifted with a unique potential that defines a destiny. A commitment to character development enables us to achieve personal excellence and find fulfillment in life. To paraphrase Martin Luther King, we strive for a school where the members of our community will be judged not by their inherent talents or native abilities but by the content of their character.

Our primary goal is the personal growth of Hyde's students but our experience has taught us that all constituents - students, teachers and parents - must strive for personal growth in order for Hyde's teenagers to achieve it. As we narrow the gap between what we want to foster and how we foster it, we continue to believe that our successes are due more to an adherence to a belief system than to a set curriculum. The cornerstones of that belief system are the Five Words and Five Principles.

The Five Words have adorned the school's shield since its founding.

COURAGE
INTEGRITY
LEADERSHIP
CURIOSITY
CONCERN

The Five Principles were adopted by the entire community in 1988:

DESTINY: Each of us is gifted with a Unique Potential.

HUMILITY: We believe in a power and a purpose beyond ourselves.

CONSCIENCE: We attain our best through character and conscience.

TRUTH: Truth is our primary guide.

BROTHER'S KEEPER: We help others achieve their best.

We value these words and aspire to reflect these principles in our individual and collective endeavors. Our respect in this community and that which we accord our peers is a direct reflection of these efforts.

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